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HOLY GROUND

THREE SERMONS

ON

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

PREACHED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

BY

J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D.

CANON OF WESTMINSTER

London

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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Sit Dominus Deus noster nobiscum :
Sicut fuit cum patribus nostris.

HOLY GROUND

I

THE HOPE OF A NATION

“ The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”—DEUT. XXXIII. 27.

THESE are among the last words of the parting blessing of Moses. Before the aged statesman-prophet, who has led the people through the wilderness to the very borders of the promised land, climbs the hill where (as the old tradition says) he died of the kiss of God, he sums up his experience of the past and declares his hope for the future.

The words were spoken, as all the greatest utterances of the Old Testament were spoken, to a people.

‘There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms : and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee ; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety ; alone : the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine : also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel ! who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the

shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency ! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee ; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.'

It was a people's promise, and a people's hope. The hope of an individual immortality was not revealed in the earlier stages of the Jewish religion. It was to be enough for the individual that he should serve his generation, and sleep with his fathers. He had no promise of an awakening. In some of the later Psalms, and in the books of the Apocrypha, the hope of personal life after death begins to dawn : but it was left for Christianity to proclaim this as a fundamental truth of religion. It was Christ who 'brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.'

The hope of the Israelite was a national hope. His fathers had known God, and done their work, and passed to their rest. He in his turn was allowed to know God, and do his share of work, and be buried with his fathers ; leaving children and children's children to carry the work still further forward, till at last it reached its glorious consummation. The Nation lived on and expanded and developed ; blessed when it feared the Lord, punished when it forgot Him. Thousands and tens of thousands of its sons and daughters passed, but the Nation still lived on, and learned to look for its perfect glory in the future, when the King Messiah should reign in righteousness over the whole earth, sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem.

This was the ideal of the great poets and prophets of the Jewish people. It was a national, and not an individual hope.

It is nowhere more magnificently expressed than in the ninetieth Psalm. 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge

from one generation to another.' The individual is like the grass; 'in the morning it is green and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.' The span of life is threescore years and ten, or possibly fourscore. But God remains, and the people of God remains. And the final and all-satisfying hope of the individual is that he may wisely spend his days, and faithfully do his task, and that the future may see the completed result. 'Shew Thy servants Thy work: and their children Thy glory.'

Think, for one moment, of this vast church, built by successive generations, rising to overshadow the graves of hundreds of its builders. Look at that solitary workman, swung in mid-air, chiselling some unseen, unnoticed ornament. What is the extent, or the value, of his individual work? Can he hope to see the great design carried to completion in his life-time? No! he must work while it is day for him, and then lie down to sleep the great sleep when his night-time comes. But others—his children or his grand-children—will see the full glory of the finished temple. And so every stroke of his patient chisel is in itself a prayer that his tiny part may be not unworthy of the glorious whole; that the work of the present may help to make up the majesty of the future:

‘Shew Thy servants Thy work,
And their children Thy glory.’

That ninetyeth Psalm is called ‘A prayer of Moses, the man of God.’ Whatever may be the value of the tradition, we may at least trace the harmony of its thought with the Blessing from which we take our text. Israel is in the hands of God: ‘The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.’ The continuity of

national life is a perpetual inspiration. He, watching over Israel, guides its destinies : from generation to generation it finds its refuge in Him. Its leaders pass, its meaner folk pass too : but the people remains in the very bosom of the Eternal : ‘underneath it are the everlasting arms.’

Is the eternal God the refuge of nations to-day? Or was the Jewish dispensation a temporary phase with no permanent lesson for the world?

If we study the history of revelation, we shall find that it has connected itself with the expanding life of a people. God reveals Himself to a man—to a family—to a nation. And to each in turn the promise is made : ‘In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’

Christianity does not reject the method, though it enlarges the scope of God’s dealing. It introduces a wider conception, and presents a cosmopolitan ideal.

It might have seemed, on the arrival of Christianity, that national life was a thing of the past. For Christianity came into the world under the Roman empire : and the universalism of Rome was the foe of nationalism. But presently Rome broke up. The false unity gave a witness that some day there should be a true unity, and then fell to pieces to shew that it was not that true unity itself.

The nations awoke, and have been slowly developing themselves. And we have been taught that just as the true nation does not suppress the family, so the true human unity does not suppress either the family or the nation, but promises both in their fullest realization.

God is not indeed the God of a single nation as against the rest : just as He is not the God of a single family as against others. But He is the God of nations, and the Judge among the nations. Every true nation, that believes in God and does righteousness, can claim the

promise of these words, as much as the Jewish nation could : 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

There are times when a nation becomes for a while vividly conscious of its corporate life. These times are not the dangerous 'hours of wealth,' but the more blessed, because the more uniting, moments of common anxiety and trouble. Then it is that a silence is made in which you almost hear the pulsings of that mighty heart : then the great and small alike forget their miserable individuality, and rise to remember that they are parts of a whole.

A young lad said to me two nights ago, fixing his deep earnest gaze upon me for some time before he spoke, 'You will pray for the soldiers, won't you?' And when I asked him whether he had any friend in the campaign, he said, 'No—but it does seem so terrible.'

More than the speeches of all the politicians that simple incident told me that we were *one*. In reckoning up what spiritual gains we may set against the evils and losses of war, we shall do well to lay stress on its proved power to unite the Nation as a single man in presence of a common trouble.

This unity is God's highest gift to a people. The renewed sense of it is a promise that He has not forsaken us.

We believe that God is not our God alone, but the one God who has made 'all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord.' But this large faith shall not prevent us from invoking the God of our fathers, whose hand we trace in all our national history ; from

committing our cause to Him, in repentance and humility, but yet in strong confidence. For all the pride and selfishness that mingles with our motive, for all in detail that may have been wrong in the method of our policy—and for the most part it is too soon for human judgment to pronounce on that—we know that He will punish us. But we believe that our cause is bound up with liberty and human progress ; and we call upon God to prosper our effort to maintain it. ‘The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.’ The Lord our God unite us, and keep us united. The Lord our God forgive us, and purify us, and lead us in the paths of righteousness, for His Name’s sake. So, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, for ourselves and for our brothers we will fear no evil : ‘The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.’

If the national reference of these words be their primary reference, yet we are justified in giving them a further and more personal reference in the light of the Christian revelation.

Few things can be more affecting to a Christian soul than the thought of the hundreds of lives, both on our own and on the opposing side, which are suddenly cut short in the fulness of physical vigour—lives that might have had so much before them, that might have done such great work in the world.

‘ They who marched up the bluffs last stormy week :
Some of them, ere they reached the mountain’s crown,
The wind of battle breathing on their cheek,
Suddenly laid them down.’

What is the meaning of this in the light of eternity ?
Must we content ourselves now with saying : Thou hast

shewn Thy servants Thy work ; shew their children Thy glory ?

Or may we not say

‘ That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete ? ’

May we not say that our brothers who have given their lives for us have lost them only to find them : that they live on in a waiting interval, in a world whither we too are tending, and where ‘ they without us shall not be made perfect ’ ? May we not say of them in the fullest and most personal sense : ‘ The eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are the everlasting arms ’ ?

I believe from my soul that we may. Into the reasons of this belief it would be impossible to enter now. Two Sundays hence we shall ask your contributions towards the families of those brave men who have given themselves on our behalf ; and then, if God will, we may come back to these questions again, and try to find a fuller answer to them.

Meanwhile, let us pray that God will comfort all stricken homes, alike in England and in South Africa. May He ‘ have mercy on all the wounded, our own and of the enemy ’ ; may He ‘ succour the dying, comfort the bereaved, cheer the anxious ’ ; may He ‘ uphold the faith of His servants ’—for indeed it is sometimes sorely tried—and may He ‘ give peace and lasting concord.’ This shall be our daily prayer.

And as the days go on, let us strive more and more to live worthily of our high calling as a Christian people. Let us believe more in one another, let us believe more in our Nation, let us believe more in our God. Let us

cherish the sense of national mission. It was John Milton who said two hundred years ago that when God has some hard work to be done for the world, He calls upon 'His Englishmen' to do it. Our fathers have proved the truth of this again and again. Let us not fail to bear the burden that they have transferred to our shoulders.

We shall not be the better Christians for being halting and half-hearted patriots. We have a divinely-appointed task: let us not shirk it. Let us purge our imperialism from the dross of self-seeking and vain-glory. But let us rise and answer to our call, and the God of Israel will be our God to-day. 'Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?' 'The eternal God is thy refuge: and underneath are the everlasting arms.'

II

THE CONSOLATION OF THE BEREAVED

‘The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.’—DEUT. XXXIII. 27.

Two Sundays ago we considered the hope offered by these words to a Nation, the promise of a perpetual shelter in the bosom of the Eternal. To-day, as we endeavour to relieve, so far as our gifts may enable us to do so, some of the sufferings incidental to the present war, we are to consider what consolations may be offered to individual mourners.

We begin by thinking of broken home circles. The lives lost—and we must add to them the lives permanently shattered, of which the wrecks alone will reach our shore—mean much of loss to the Nation; but how much more of loss to separate families? All these lives are strong and vigorous lives; most of them are young lives. Again and again it must inevitably be that the brightest promise, the noblest strength, the highest helpfulness is suddenly snatched from the home: the lamp is quenched, the pillar of the house is fallen.

We are asked to offer our contributions to lessen in some degree the poverty and destitution which thereby falls on poorer households, which have been robbed of the mainstay of their material fortunes: but we must not

forget that the loss is not measurable by a material standard.

By a strange and stern law of compensation, which equalizes the distribution of pain, where the material loss is the less felt the heart's loss is often the greater. No hunger, no cold, no nakedness, enters this house by reason of the new record in the registry of death. Externally, materially, all is as before. But there is the more room and scope for the agony of bereavement : there is the less possibility of assuagement by the good offices of others. Gifts can do nothing here to help : and words, we know, are often crueller than silence. The stranger cannot intermeddle : no anxious effort we can make can mitigate the bitterness.

What consolations can we offer that will nerve the hearts of rich as well as poor to bear the burden which we have imposed upon them ?

1. First, there springs to our lips the great key-word that more than any other interprets the mystery of our human life—the word SACRIFICE.

What a lesson may be taught on the battle-field itself, to the man who has seen his comrade fall by his side, has been told us by our poet-primate of Armagh. He has told us how such a man has entered into fellowship with the other world, and held communion with the dead.

‘ And thoughts beyond his thoughts the Spirit lent,
And manly tears made mist upon his eyes ;
And to him came a great presentiment
Of high self-sacrifice.’

But it is not only those who lay down their lives for us on the field of battle that have made sacrifice for the country's cause.

Look at that mother who kisses her boy for the last time, and commends him to God. Who shall measure in words what she is giving away? She weeps, but she does not withhold him. She does not say Stay, but Go. She gives him—gives a large part, perhaps the largest now, of her own life. He is her sacrifice.

And when the sad telegram comes, she weeps—but she does not repent. It was a sacrifice : she offered it, and it has been accepted. She cries indeed, ‘ Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son ! ’ But, when the first agony is past, there comes, and comes to abide, the noble pride of a true sacrifice. She would not ask it back again. It is better so. It is a gift, not a mere loss.

May I read to you some words, written at the time of the Crimean War by John Ruskin, and worthy to be recalled to-day? He is declaring his belief that, in spite of all its mistakes and its cost, that war was productive of good more than of evil.¹

‘ I will appeal at once,’ he says, ‘ to the testimony of those whom the war has cost the dearest . . . I ask *their* witness, to whom the war has changed the aspect of the earth, and imagery of heaven, whose hopes it has cut off like a spider’s web, whose treasure it has placed, in a moment, under the seals of clay. Those who can never more see sunrise, nor watch the climbing light gild the Eastern clouds, without thinking what graves it has gilded, first, far down behind the dark earth-line,—who never more shall see the crocus bloom in spring, without thinking what dust it is that feeds the wild flowers of Balaclava. Ask *their* witness, and see if they will not reply that it is well with them and with theirs ; that they would have it no otherwise ; would not, if they might,

¹ *Modern Painters*, pt. iv., ch. 18, § 33.

receive back their gifts of love and life, nor take again the purple of their blood out of the cross on the breast-plate of England.'

Forty-five years has not changed the heart of the English folk. This spirit prevails, and will prevail, in hundreds of our homes. Its nobility is its own reward : it finds a joy in having been allowed to give.

2. A true consolation, even if this were all : if death closed the story ; if there were no hereafter ; if there were no recognitions and restorations in another world.

If this were all : if the gift sacrificed were thereafter a wholly vanished thing : if it were nowhere stored in the hidden treasures of the Eternal and Divine. For sacrifice knows not how to reckon : it cannot barter : it 'rejects the lore of nicely calculated less or more.' Of such noble stuff are human hearts made, that sacrifice of itself brings joy—incalculable, unearthly, indestructible. But this is not all. We know that it is not all. We know that we cannot die with death. And so there comes to us another word of consolation—another keyword that helps to unlock the mysteries of life. It is the word RESURRECTION.

I say that we *know* that we shall not wholly die with physical death. It is true that we cannot prove it. Many things point that way. Many things shew us that it is most reasonable. Many things clear themselves when we accept that as the truth. But we cannot prove it. At least, I cannot. Indeed, I cannot even conceive of any form of proof by which it could be proved. If you demand a proof, then I ask you to tell me what kind of proof would convince you : for I know not where to begin.

Most of us will never believe that the so-called mani-

festations of the spirit-world are anything more than the reflection of the ideas of those who think they receive these manifestations. We find no proof there. Nor, if a friend of our own returned from the grave to assure us, should we believe for that : we should certainly still doubt, when he was gone, whether we had not been victims of an illusion.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the nearest thing to a logical proof that we can conceive of. Not the mere fact, attested strongly as it is by the best kinds of historical evidence ; but the fact in its setting, so to speak : the fitness of the fact as the climax of such a Life and of such a Death.

This much of proof indeed we have, and it helps to confirm our conviction. But we *know* without proof. There is something in us that is eternal, that goes out beyond the momentary and the fleeting, and that refuses to be satisfied with anything less than the eternal God.

We are certain that our short life on earth is not all : it is a stage in a larger process. Life is a school. It is not a prison : nor a play-ground : it is a school, and we are being educated for a purpose. When our school-days end, life in a sense begins ; so death, which ends this life, ushers us into another and a larger life.

Put it as you will, we have the indestructible conviction that we shall live on after death : and this conviction is allied to all in life that ennobles and uplifts : it is sanctioned and proclaimed as truth by Christ. He has 'brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.'

Here then a fresh light springs up in the darkness of bereavement—a promise that nothing of worth is really

lost—a promise of restitution—a hope full of immortality.

‘ For a while the tired body
Lies with feet toward the morn ;
Till the last and brightest Easter
Day be born.

* * * * *

‘ On that happy Easter morning
All the graves their dead restore ;
Father, sister, child, and mother,
Meet once more.’

Some one will say : your Christian doctrine brings a vast comfort to those who have ground for confidence that their dear departed were among the number of those earnest souls who had set their Master always before their eyes, who had trusted in Him and followed Him, and now sleep in Him. But if it opens a door of hope, does it not open a wider door over which is written the legend of despair ? Can you shut your eyes to the fact that many, very many, of our eager and brave young soldiers have lived lives which cannot be counted religious—that perhaps the majority had thought but little of the future, and were wholly unprepared for death ? Would it not be more merciful to keep silence altogether, than to mention that life after death, which, if it offers consolation to a few, suggests the most grievous anxiety to the many ? For what is most terrible in war ? Not the blood and wounds, not the torture of crushed limbs and the maddening thirst—not these, but the plunging of unprepared souls into eternity.

Brethren, in face of this question I dare solemnly to repeat the words of our text : ‘ The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.’

Let us ask ourselves for a moment what at all we can know of this mysterious life after death? What does it mean to have crossed the narrow stream and to have stepped out on the other side? Some things I am sure it does not mean :

(a) It does not mean a wholly new beginning. The man is what he was ; what his life has made him to be. There is no break in his character. His conditions have changed, but he is the same. All he has been and all he has done is with him now.

‘ I looked behind to find my past,
And, lo, it had gone before.’

(b) Nor again does it mean an absolute fixity. It is true that the moment after death I shall be just what I was the moment before death : but it is not therefore true that I shall continue to be that for all the future. Progress, movement, development—these are implied when we speak of life, whether in this world or another. I cannot believe the theory—for it is but a theory—that the moment of physical death is the moment in which a man’s state is eternally and unalterably fixed. I cannot find that in my Bible : all nature, all analogy, is against it. It cannot be.

What then does death bring with it? I would venture to reply, a change of sphere : and I mean especially that direct contact with the eternal and the real of which most of us know so little now.

Here we are surrounded with material shrouds and veils, which come between us and the realities which are about us. There are moments in which we recognize these realities, and then all else seems nothing in com-

parison. But these moments pass, and we forget or ignore or deny their existence again.

Death will bring us face to face with things as they are. All veils and covers will be torn away, all falsehoods and shams will disappear. The soul, stripped and bare, will find itself in a region of absolute reality, in eternity, in 'the hands of the living God.' That is what death will bring.

To some of us it will not be wholly a surprise. For after all, we are even now 'in His hands.' It is the one firm conviction of our lives that at this moment the eternal God *is* our refuge, and that underneath us are the everlasting arms. In moments of spiritual weariness, tired in the upward struggle, exhausted by failure, and longing to be delivered from ourselves, we lean back and feel the pressure of those 'everlasting arms' as they close around us : and their touch is life-giving, and we are strong again. And to find ourselves at death in these same arms will be no new thing, but the very consummation of our highest experiences on earth.

To others of us it will be a surprise, an awful revelation. We have never perhaps realized the nearness of God. 'Thou art about my path and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. There is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and hast laid Thine hand upon me.' That is so now : but we are forgetting it : we are not realizing it. And then suddenly, in an instant, we shall find it to be altogether true. We shall drop as it seems into the darkness : but the darkness is no darkness with Him. We shall find that we have fallen 'into the hands of the living God.'

To some, I say, it will not be altogether unfamiliar ;

to others it will be a startling surprise. But to *all* it must be the very best thing possible. It must be good to find ourselves in His hands. There is none who loves us as He loves us. It must be good—nay, the very best—to come right into the presence of God : to find ourselves there with no cover and no escape. It is a fearful thing indeed. Only one thing could be more fearful : that is, if it were possible to pass into some world where He was *not* ; into some universe which God did not guide and govern, where He had abdicated His control : to fall *out of* the hands of the living God. That would be death indeed—utter, irremediable despair.

‘ I know not where His islands lift
 Their fronded palms in air ;
 I only know I cannot drift
 Beyond His love and care.’

I say these things, not because I think lightly of the importance of this present time of life as a preparation for the future : not, God knows, because I think lightly of the sinfulness of sin, and of the certainty of its punishment, and of the danger of a hardened will that persistently refuses, and may refuse even after death, to submit to the will of God.

No, but I say them because the false theory of the fixity of a man’s state after death has wrought misery and despair in the tender souls of those who have been left behind, and have not dared to cherish a hope. I say them on the chance of lifting from one bereaved heart a burden which it need not bear. If our poor human love can follow those who have passed out of our sight, how much more can the great love of God follow and overtake and compass round the souls which He has made ?

These two thoughts then I leave with you—*Sacrifice* and *Resurrection*. Is it not significant that the religion, which has proclaimed the divineness of Sacrifice, is the religion which has declared to us the Resurrection: that it is the Faith of the Cross which has for ever rolled back the stone that closed the tomb? The Christ of the supreme Sacrifice is the Christ of the certain Resurrection.

III

HOLY GROUND

‘ Loose thy shoe from off thy foot : for the place whereon thou standest is holy.’—JOSHUA V. 15.

It is hardly possible for a preacher, whose duty calls him to stand in this pulpit Sunday after Sunday at the present time, to forbear from offering some counsels as to the spirit in which Christian men should fulfil their responsibility in regard to the war which is being carried on in their name. It is certainly impossible that the topic should be avoided by one who has been kneeling here day by day to lead the intercessions of an earnest congregation on behalf of those who direct and carry out, as well as those who suffer by, the war ; and who yesterday morning stood among the multitudes who watched the departure of our Volunteers, literally hugged by the populace as they struggled through the crowded streets.

But the subject is a difficult one. It would be easy indeed to utter patriotic sentiments, or to echo the cries of imperialistic enthusiasm which daily fill our ears. But it is not easy to lift the whole subject into the spiritual region, and to regard it in the light of Christian responsibility and in the light of the eternal Purpose of God for mankind. And yet if we would be true to our faith in Christ we must seek so to regard it. We who sit here at home are

hurrying into eternity by a violent death hundreds, nay thousands, of our brave sons and of their brave foes. This alone should give us pause. Besides, we are passing through a crisis in the history of the English people, which we cannot measure at the moment, and which will decide issues for a long future. These things are a call to a religious seriousness : 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot : for the place whereon thou standest is holy.'

The ground on which Joshua stood was no sacred place in the ordinary meaning of the term. It was the ground over which he was to pass to his first battle. It would seem that he had gone out by himself to examine it beforehand. 'And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked ; and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand : and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries ? And he said, Nay : but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.' He was a divine messenger to assure him that the conflicts of the visible world are being fought out in the invisible world. 'And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant ? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot : for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' The divine guidance is given only to reverence and awe. We mark our battle-fields with a cross after the event. We need to recognize beforehand the holiness of the ground on which human forces are to contend.

In order that we may pierce beneath the outward show of things, I would ask you to analyse the effect upon a man of some strength and goodness of being entrusted with a new and difficult and responsible task.

On the one hand, the new claim draws out whatever is strongest and bravest in him : it equips him with the moral weapons of hopefulness and determination, it reveals unsuspected resources of power, it calls into play faculties which had been trained without his being aware of them : he is more and greater than he knew.

On the other hand, he recognizes more than before his limitations : he sees the necessity for correcting many shortcomings and developing capacities for which hitherto he had no employment ; he is struck with remorse for neglected opportunities, he is moved to regret the carelessness of his self-discipline, he feels with sadness how much more he could do now, if only he were a better man : in a word, he is humbled.

The consciousness of strength and the sense of humility are not inconsistent : they are evoked together by a new call of responsibility.

To the religious man, who has learned something of the hallowing of life, the acceptance and fulfilment of such a responsibility will influence the intercourse of his soul with God in two directions.

The opportunity of high service is in itself a subject of thankfulness to God : to be called to difficulty and strenuous exertion is honour and privilege. Moreover, the consciousness of power issues for a true man not in foolish pride, but in gratitude and a desire for fuller consecration.

But, again, the remembrance of past failures, the feeling of unworthiness, the sense of insufficiency for the task, combine to produce penitence, lowliness of spirit, and dependence upon God. The very thought that God deigns to use us after all, that the call comes from God, and is a pledge of God's presence and assistance, deepens

these feelings. And the first difficulties which check us do not stagger us, but sober us, and make us yet more penitent, more lowly, and more dependent upon God.

The joint result of these mingled feelings is the prostration of our souls before God, first to thank Him for calling us to His service and endowing us with powers to serve Him ; and then to humble ourselves before Him on account of those sins which 'sorely let and hinder us in running the way of His commandments' ; and then to implore His continual help to further our endeavours and grant us good success. We have heard, as we went forth to survey the work that lay before us, the Voice that says, 'Loose thy shoe from off thy foot : for the place whereon thou standest is holy.'

This, surely, is the spirit in which any Christian man must meet new responsibility of an arduous kind : and it is thus that he must comport himself, as he learns to appreciate his task, and finds perhaps that it is more trying and more costly than he had supposed.

Nor can I see any reason why it should be otherwise with the larger Man, which is the summing up of a Christian nation.

Our nation at the close of this century has reached a position of prosperity, power and prestige, which has no parallel in history.

The empires of the past were empires of force and oppression. Some of them, it is true, wrought solid improvement for their subject populations. The Roman empire in especial gave good laws and sometimes good administration of justice to its provinces ; it opened up highways of commerce, and, apart from frontier warfares, it compelled the world to be at peace. But the centre was fattened by nourishment which it drew from the whole

area with ruthless selfishness : the old Roman virtue died, the heart of the empire rotted with corruption and immoralities ; its defence was more and more entrusted to mercenary troops ; new populations in the north were feeling their power ; and from causes internal and external the empire crumbled and fell.

The Napoleonic empire was the creation of the genius of a single man : it was a wholly unnatural combination, built up on mere military force, and outraging the newly awakened instincts of liberty which were characteristic of the age. It fell as suddenly as it rose, because the banner of liberty was lifted against it.

But that which—for lack of a better word—we call our Empire to-day is a wholly new thing in the world. The motherland has planted out her daughter states in vast countries beyond the seas. She has learned by one fearful loss that she cannot hold them in leading-strings, but can only rule them by trusting to their filial instinct, and by offering them continually the protection and the guidance and the unity which are the blessings of a family life.

She has dowered them with that which she herself counts most dear, with that which she has gained and preserved at the greatest cost—with liberty. So she stands a proud mother of nations, which are bound to her by the bonds of reverence and love. Never before has she been so strong, never so glorious, never so free, never so prosperous. Nothing in her history—nothing in the world's history—has been so splendid in its significance as the gathering of her children from the ends of the earth to do honour to their Queen after sixty years of happy sovereignty. The greatness of that moment flashed in the almost prophetic strains of the imperial poet, who bade us beware ' lest we forget ' the spiritual source of our strength.

Two years and a half are gone, and we find ourselves to-day burdened with a new and arduous task. It is the assertion of equality between all men of European descent in the regions of South Africa for which we have any responsibility. It is a struggle to maintain the British ideal—the open door of civic liberty—against a lower ideal, the prevalence of which, our experience has taught us, must be a curse to humanity. However we came into this position, this is where we stand ; and there are few of us who think that our duty is not plain.

The task has proved far heavier than any of us had imagined. We are facing a people not only armed with the most modern weapons behind almost inaccessible entrenchments : but, what is more, a people fighting for an ideal—lower than our ideal indeed, an ideal of exclusiveness and of racial domination,—but yet an ideal, and one closely resembling that of ancient Israel, and only wrong by comparison with a higher ideal ; and so maintaining a cause upon which they (no less sincerely than we on our part) can invoke the blessing of God. Small though their numbers be compared with our ultimate strength, the whole world watches anxiously for the issue. It is an hour of crisis, that is, of divine judgment : ‘Thou didst cause Thy judgment to be heard from heaven : the earth trembled and was still.’

Of all the reassuring elements of the situation, which may support our faith at this crisis, none is to my mind comparable with the fact that we have, and have had from the first, the moral sympathy of all our Colonies and of the American people. From every quarter of the globe the children of the old Mother have spontaneously declared her quarrel to be just, and have sprung unbidden to arms and prayed that they may seal their witness with their

blood. And the great daughter Republic, who claimed her independence a hundred years ago, and has maintained it with no little bitterness against us, has now for the first time been drawn into fellow-feeling with us, in the conviction that our cause is the cause of the true progress of the world. *Voces populorum*: the freest peoples of the world have spoken. Are we wrong in thinking that we hear the voice of God?

At home the war has been already fruitful. The sense of common anxiety has drawn together parties in the State and classes in society. We have learned, more clearly than ever before in this generation, that we are one. Our first rebuffs have nerved our determination, and called out a splendid enthusiasm and readiness for sacrifice.

Thus one of the two effects which we found resulting to an individual from a new call to a responsible task has manifested itself in the national life. The task has drawn out our strength and courage: it has revealed unsuspected resources of power; it has given us a fresh sense of responsible mission.

Nor has the other effect been absent. We have quickly learned some lessons as to our own deficiencies, which were much needed for our moral health. We had come to take ourselves altogether too easily; to suppose ourselves the virtuous nation, the darling of Providence, the vanguard of the human race; and our reflections, by way of comparison, on our European neighbours have lacked modesty. Suddenly it has come home to us that such an Empire as God has given to us is attended with the most costly obligations, and involves personal sacrifices if it is to be maintained at all.

Thank God, it is the People which rules, and the People which makes the sacrifices. We are one in power, one in

sacrifice. It is not, as once it was, kings claiming new crowns on the ground of disputable genealogies, or to satisfy dynastic ambitions, and sacrificing their peoples to their projects of aggrandisement. It is the People making war, because it feels it must, unless it would be untrue to itself. And the People which has been too light-hearted in its boast of imperial greatness is now being sobered and quieted, and, in the true sense, humbled by realizing the magnitude of its responsibility and the costliness of fulfilling its mission.

And how should all this affect the People in its relation to God ?

The renewed consciousness of strength and of mission is a subject for national thankfulness. God has entrusted us with a high responsibility. He has indeed pushed us forward to the forefront of His Purpose. He has chosen to work out through the Anglo-Saxon race a fresh stage in the development of the great human unity—a family of kindred nationalities, bound together not by force, but only by the natural bonds of mutual reverence, filial and parental love : free to part, yet never so eager to cling together ; labouring to conciliate ancient differences, and desiring to stand for freedom and for peace, if need be, against all the world beside.

For this we thank God. And we thank Him that He has made us here the centre of so vast a work for humanity.

But let us see to it that we humble ourselves before Him who is willing thus to make us the instruments of His Purpose. He is calling us by the providence of events to take a lowlier estimate, not of our task, but of ourselves, that we may be the fitter for His high service.

It is not craven fear which has been sending us to our prayers. As we gather in this place at half-past twelve

each day our motives in the main are two : (1) a desire for corporate prayer for our Nation, that it may have God's help in fulfilling its responsibility, both now and when, at the close of the war, we have to shew why we waged it by our action after it ; and (2) sympathy with the sufferings of individuals, and a longing to pray for the wounded and the dying—wounded and dying for us—and for the bereaved, who have made so great sacrifices for our sakes.

These are our prayers ; and to them must we add not only our thanksgivings for God's great goodness to us as a People, but our confession of our many common sins. Thankful and humbled, we loose the shoe from off our foot, because the ground on which we stand at this crisis is holy ground ; and we wait in hushed silence to learn what the Lord our God would say to us.

Two days ago the Bishop of one of the great dioceses that are nearest to us here proclaimed a Day of Fast and Prayer. In former times of national anxiety since the Reformation this has been done again and again by the State for the whole Nation at once. The experience of the last occasions shewed that a public cessation of work was turned by many to wrong purposes, and that the object sought was not thus to be best obtained. As it is, vast numbers of the People have turned spontaneously to prayer, and services of intercessions are being very widely held.

That the solemn Fast should be joined with the solemn Prayer was always the English tradition even in the most Puritan times. One of the causes of the decay of religion in the land more than a hundred years ago was, according to John Wesley, the neglect of Fasting. We may recognize with thankfulness that Lent is coming to be better observed year by year, and we may hope that this year, with

its special seriousness, will mark a great stage in advance. But we may do well at this time to remember that our Church appoints for all her children a weekly fast. How much nearer to God would the Nation be now, if this had been continuously observed with due obedience !

Whether or no there be another day of Fast and Prayer appointed, I would venture to suggest to you that you should observe the Fridays which remain before Lent, with at least the same observance as you would give to Lent itself, and use them for the special purpose of humble intercession.

Let them be in some sense real fasts, so far as your occupations and your health may allow ; and as you humble yourselves before God, think not of your own needs or your own shortcomings, but send up your prayers in common to Almighty God on behalf of the Nation, that He will pardon our many national sins, that He will give us the spirit of penitence and amendment, that He will fill us with a sense of national mission and responsibility, that He will prosper our arms, and protect our soldiers, and bless the closing years of our religious and gracious Queen with the blessings of peace ; that the blood of England's sons may be precious in His sight, that He will accept our sacrifice ; and that He will guide the issue of the war in righteousness, to the blessing of our brave foes as well as of ourselves, and to the furtherance of His purpose of the unity of mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

APPENDIX

*As requests are being continually made for copies of the following Service,
it has seemed worth while to reprint it here.*

WESTMINSTER ABBEY. SERVICE OF INTERCESSION.

January, 1900, at 12.30 in the Choir.

V. The Lord our God be with us ;

R. As He was with our fathers.

Let us pray.

Our Father.

HYMN FOR ABSENT FRIENDS.

(A. and M. 595 to 2nd tune of 254.)

HOLY FATHER, in Thy mercy

Hear our anxious prayer,

Keep our loved ones, now far absent,

'Neath Thy care.

JESUS, SAVIOUR, let Thy presence

Be their light and guide ;

Keep, oh, keep them, in their weakness,

At Thy side.

When in sorrow, when in danger,

When in loneliness,

In Thy love look down and comfort

Their distress.

May the joy of Thy salvation
 Be their strength and stay ;
 May they love and may they praise Thee
 Day by day.

HOLY SPIRIT, let Thy teaching
 Sanctify their life ;
 Send Thy grace, that they may conquer
 In the strife.

FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT,
 GOD the ONE in THREE,
 Bless them, guide them, save them, keep them
 Near to Thee. Amen.

Let us pray.

O ALMIGHTY LORD, who art a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in Thee, to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey : Be now and evermore our defence : prosper the forces of our Queen and country : decide the issues of war according to righteousness : have mercy on all the wounded, our own and of the enemy : succour the dying : comfort the bereaved : cheer the anxious : uphold the faith of Thy servants, and give peace and lasting concord. Hear us, O Lord, from Heaven Thy dwelling-place, and when Thou hearest, forgive, through the mediation of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A FEW VERSES FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE.

Let us pray.

O LORD GOD OF HOSTS, by whose permission nation riseth against nation, who usest their swords for Thy judgments, and at Thy will makest war to cease : Purify us, we humbly pray Thee, from all sin in our share or this present strife ; bring it speedily, in Thy good pleasure, to a just and lasting peace ; and meanwhile,

For those who are gone forth to fight, whether from home or from our Colonies, that Thou wouldest give them courage in danger, protection in conflict, and mercy in victory ;
Hear us, good Lord :

For those who suffer,—the dying, the wounded, the sick, the mourners for the fallen,—that Thou wouldest be with them for support and comfort ;

Hear us, good Lord :

For those who are gone forth to minister to the suffering, to their souls and bodies,—that Thou wouldest grant them skill and tenderness and endurance in patient watching to the healing of pain and sorrow ;

Hear us, good Lord :

And if it may be, O our God, over-rule, we beseech Thee, all things to the blessed issue, beyond mere earthly peace, of restored brotherhood among nations, and the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. All this we ask, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TIME FOR SILENT PRAYER.

WE humbly beseech Thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities ; and for the glory of Thy Name turn from us all those evils that we most righteously have deserved ; and grant that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in Thy mercy, and evermore serve Thee in holiness and pureness of living, to Thy honour and glory ; through our only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN.

O GOD, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art GOD,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun,

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away ;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

O GOD, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home. Amen.

Or one of the following :—

GOD moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform :
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take :
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain ;
GOD is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain. Amen.

THY kingdom come, O GOD,
Thy rule, O CHRIST, begin ;
Break with Thine iron rod
The tyrannies of sin.

Where is Thy reign of peace,
And purity, and love ?
When shall all hatred cease,
As in the realms above ?

When comes the promised time
That war shall be no more,
And lust, oppression, crime,
Shall flee Thy face before ?

We pray thee, LORD, arise,
And come in Thy great might ;
Revive our longing eyes,
Which languish for Thy sight.

Men scorn Thy sacred Name,
And wolves devour Thy fold ;
By many deeds of shame
We learn that love grows cold.

O'er heathen lands afar
Thick darkness broodeth yet :
Arise, O morning Star,
Arise, and never set. Amen.

The Grace of our Lord.

BY ORDER OF THE DEAN.







